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C O N F I D E N T I A L MINSK 000539

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: AUTHORITIES FIRE OPPOSITION LEADER'S MOTHER

REF: A. 05 MINSK 601

[B](#). MINSK 440

[C](#). 06 MINSK 1307

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (U) On June 18, a judge in the northern city of Vitebsk rejected a civil suit filed by Tatyana Severinets against the local school district for terminating her employment on April 3 after she had gone to Poland for a teacher training conference during her school's official spring break. Severinets is the mother of recently released political prisoner and opposition youth organization Malady Front founder Pavel Severinets (refs A and B). During the proceedings, observed by the Embassy and the OSCE, Severinets testified that the school principal had granted her permission to travel. On the day she was to travel, February 26, a school district official notified Severinets' school that the superintendent had denied her leave on February 23. Believing the refusal was an error or a politically-motivated "provocation" in retribution for her union activism, Severinets pressed forward with her travels.

[1](#)2. (C) Despite admitting that Severinets had been an excellent teacher with a perfect record since her employment in 1994, the district superintendent was adamant that Severinets had to be fired to send a message to other critical services employees, such as police and firefighters, that the authorities would not tolerate unauthorized absences. Seeming to contradict his own deputy's testimony, he told the court that he personally called the teacher four days before her trip to deny her leave request -- a claim denied by Severinets -- but was unwilling to permit Severinets' lawyer to examine his cell phone records. Moreover, throughout the hearing, several of Severinets' witnesses, including her principal, altered their expected testimony to support the superintendent's version of events. Appearing shocked, Severinets told us that she suspects that authorities pressured them and characterized this pressure as retaliation for her son's continuing opposition activities. She added that she plans to form a support group with other repressed teachers.

Comment

[1](#)3. (C) Severinets is not the first Belarusian educator -- nor even the first with a Malady Front connection (ref C) -- to be dismissed for dubious and politically-motivated reasons. Her firing and the likely rigged proceedings that denied her reinstatement highlight yet again the repressive and petty nature of the Lukashenko regime. That authorities on the one hand release Pavel Severinets, and on the other retaliate against his mother indicates a lack of GOB bureaucratic coordination.

